

Pope Pleads for Mid-East Peace

Here is an NC News translation of the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's Italian-language comments on the situation in the Middle East. The comments were made during his general audience Sept. 15 at the Vatican.

Brothers and sisters,

I am deeply grieved by the death of Bashir Gemayel, president-elect of Lebanon, provoked yesterday by a barbarous act of terrorism which caused tens of dead and wounded.

I unite myself in a spirit of intense prayer to the sorrow of the family of the president, of the families of the other victims, and to the mourning of Lebanon, which has seen another serious tragedy added to the tragedies of recent years in the person of the one who had been designated to rule over its destiny.

My reprobation for a gesture of such ferocity is total; I mourn the life barbarously cut short of a prestigious young man and his collaborators; and I grieve, as the head of Catholicism, for the loss of a son of the Maronite community. The apostolic nuncio in Beirut has informed me that in a meeting with him yesterday, a few hours before the assassination attempt, President Gemayel confirmed to the representative of the pope that he considered himself "a devoted son of the church."

In addition, I cannot hide my concern for the consequences which the dramatic event could have for Lebanon itself and for the tormented region of the Middle East.

I wish therefore to address myself to all Lebanese, Christians and non-Christians, and exhort them with paternal concern and affection, to give reason to this tragic circumstance in order to strengthen their bonds, to unite themselves for the good of the country and

absolutely not to yield to reactions of violence or of divisions.

Lebanon needs to recover its serenity and peace and sovereignty over all its territory with respect for legal authority. To this end the country needs the real and efficient collaboration of all its ethnic and religious components.

In these weeks, the tragic siege of Beirut having ended, there has been an intense diplomatic work with a flourishing of plans for relaunching negotiations and opening the way for a global solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

The Holy See is following with most attentive interest these initiatives and appreciates every effort which is made to favor dialogue and negotiation in order to arrive finally at a settlement of the conflict.

She wants to contribute with the means that conform to her nature and mission on the level of moral principles, facing these with concrete reality to indicate the needs that, in her opinion, must be present in the search for a peaceful solution.

The Holy See is convinced above all that there will not be able to be true peace without justice; and that there will not be able to be justice if the rights of all the people involved are not recognized and accepted, in a stable mode, fair and equal.

Among these rights, primordial and irrenounceable, is that of existence and security on one's own territory, in safeguarding the proper identity of each one.

It is a dilemma which is debated in a bitter manner between two peoples, the Israelis and the Palestinians, who have seen simultaneously or alternately their rights assaulted or denied.

The pope and the Catholic Church look with

sympathy and consideration toward both these peoples, heirs and witnesses of diverse religious, historic and cultural traditions but both rich in values similarly respectable.

Several months ago, at the Sunday Angelus of last April 4, I dared to ask this precise question: "Is it unrealistic, after so many disappointments, to hope that one day these two peoples, each accepting the existence and reality of the other, can find a way to a dialogue that makes them arrive at a just solution, in which both live in peace, in their own dignity and liberty, mutually giving each other a commitment of tolerance and reconciliation?" Today I repeat the question with more force, and even in the hope that the painful experience that has been experienced in these months can hasten a positive response from both sides, encouraged and sustained by the solidarity of friendly countries of both, and that they may abandon every recourse to war, to violence and to all forms of armed struggle, some of which in the past have been particularly ruthless and inhuman.

At the end of this laborious road of peace, for the reconciliation and meeting among different peoples, I see the holy city of Jerusalem rising ideally as a glowing light that invites comprehension and love.

It is the city of God, which he made the object of his satisfaction and where he revealed the great mysteries of his love for man. Jerusalem can also become the city of man, in which believers in the three great monotheistic religions — Christianity, Judaism and Islam — live in full liberty and equality with the followers of other religious communities, in the recognized guarantee that the city is the sacred patrimony of all, in order to attend to the activities which ennoble man: the adoration of the one God, meditation and works of brotherhood.

I pray God and I invite you to do it with me, so that these yearnings for peace and hopes of peace can be verified soon for all the Middle East and especially for Jerusalem, for the Holy Land and for Lebanon.

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